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WASHINGTON (AFP) – Influential US lawmakers on Thursday called for levying a new income tax to pay for the war in Afghanistan, warning its costs pose a mortal threat to efforts like a sweeping health care overhaul.

"Regardless of whether one favors the war or not, if it is to be fought, it ought to be paid for," the lawmakers, all prominent Democratic allies of President Barack Obama, said in a joint statement.

The proposed "Share The Sacrifice Act of 2010" came with Obama set to announce within weeks his decision on whether to send more US troops to fight the war, now in its ninth year.

The group included House Appropriations Committee Chairman Dave Obey; Representative John Murtha, who chair that panel's defense subcommittee; and House Financial Services Committee Chairman Barney Frank.

The proposal, a heavily symbolic measure seen as having next to no chance of becoming law, would impose a war surtax on income beginning in 2011 -- though it would allow the president to delay implementation by one year upon deciding the US economy is too weak to sustain such a tax shift.

It would also exempt members of the US military who have served in combat since the September 11, 2001 terrorist strikes, their families, and families of soldiers who died as a result of combat.

"The only people who’ve paid any price for our military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan are our military families," the lawmakers said. "We believe that if this war is to be fought, it’s only fair that everyone share the burden."

If the war is not paid for, its costs "will devour money that could be used to rebuild our economy by fixing our broken health care system, expanding educational opportunities and job training possibilities, attacking our long term energy problems and building stronger communities," they said.

The measure would create a three-tiered change in income tax with the goal of paying for all of the war's costs.

Couples earning up to 150,000 dollars per year would see a one-percent increase in their regular tax level, from 15 percent currently to 15.15 percent.

For those making between 150,000-250,000 dollars per year or 250,000 dollars or above, the president would have to set the rate increase high enough to pay for the remaining war costs, and in such a way that the middle-tier earners pay half what the top earners do.

Currently, the war costs roughly 68 billion dollars per year, which would mean that the middle tier would see its rate rise from 28 percent to 29.5 percent, while the top would climb from 33 percent to 36.6 percent, according to a person familiar with the plan.